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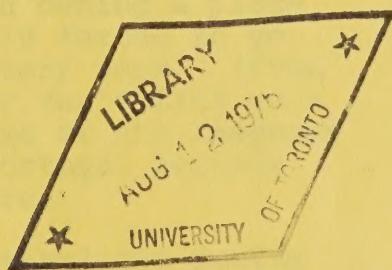
THE ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS OF THE PORTUGUESE MOTHER: PANEL PRESENTATION

Government
Publications

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at the Portuguese Intercultural Seminar
St. Helen's Portuguese Community Centre
November 21, 1973

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Ontario

Ministry of
Culture and
Recreation

Multicultural
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THE ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS OF THE PORTUGUESE MOTHER

by Fatima Pires

As Mr. Pessoa explained this morning, most Portuguese immigrants come from a rural area of Portugal or the Azores. Coming to Canada is a great experience, especially for the mothers, whose scope of life is usually just her family and her home.

You can see the drastic change that awaits her in Canada. She has to adjust to a completely new way of life, a city life which she never knew.

One of the first adjustments she has to make is not living in a place of her own. In Portugal she had a house, and no matter how small or how poor it was, it was hers. Now, at least for the first few years, she has to live in a flat. This can be quite an experience. They're on the lookout almost 24 hours a day, seeing that their children don't make too much noise so as not to disturb the owners of the house. I know of some mothers who have been almost on the verge of a nervous breakdown because of this.

Since their main objective when they get here is paying off their debts, if they have any, and owning a place of their own, the mother is practically forced to go to work. It's mostly cleaning or factory work. (Even if they have a trade or a degree, they can't find work in their area of specialization because of the language problem). It's quite a change from Portugal because most mothers don't go out to work there.

Another drastic change is that in Portugal the family was the centre of her world. She had time to hold it together. Here in Canada she doesn't have very much time to dedicate to her children. When she gets home, tired from work, she has to cook dinner, clean the house, and do the laundry. That doesn't leave much time for her children.

As the children learn English and get on in school, she cannot follow their progress. For one thing, she doesn't know English and can't read or understand their reports or talk to their teachers. She has no idea of the programme in school, no idea of the method used. To a lot of them school is a place where they learn "bad things". It's at school that they learn sex education and (according to the mothers) where they learn to practice it. This is not too hard to understand when you stop to consider that this subject is never talked about in the home. Sometimes I wonder how they have so many children.

Most of the mother's problems fall into the category of parent/child relationship. I can say that the generation gap among the Portuguese is very wide. Most parents are still living 20 or 50 years ago in their small village. They have not adapted themselves to this new way of life. Most of their children are or feel like Canadians. There's a clash then in culture: the parents wanting their children to remain Portuguese and the children trying to break away.

It's very hard for the mother to understand or to accept many Canadian ideas, like dating, for instance, or going out at night. It's unthinkable, a girl going out with her boyfriend without a chaperone. It's just not done.

Another thing, both the families of the girl and the boy have to agree with the courtship. In Portugal, for the first couple of years after the boy meets the girl and they decide to go steady, the boy is not allowed to go out with the girl, not even to go into the house. They talk, the girl from the window and the boy outside on the street. They're lucky if the girl is allowed to use a window on the first floor. If not, she has to use a window on the second floor.

Only after they go on like this for a while and both families agree, will he then come in the house and ask for the hand of the girl and officially start their engagement. Now he may come in the house on the days designated by the father and they can even go out - with a chaperone, of course!

You can see that this just isn't done here. The children feel the same way. When they try to do as they see here, that's when war starts.

The mother is usually the one who suffers most because she's caught between her husband and her children. She covers up for her daughters, even though she may be completely against her ideas and her attitudes. But in

order to keep peace in the home, she has to lie to her husband because she knows what the circumstances would be if he found out his daughters were going out with boys. So the mother acts as a buffer.

The mother has no source of entertainment but T.V. At least now there are some Portuguese programmes on T.V. she can watch.

You can see that most of the mother's problems exist because she doesn't speak English and she holds on to her culture and traditions and doesn't very easily let go. How can we solve these problems? Maybe you have suggestions, which we can discuss in the workshops.

I know that there are many school principals here as well as other people working for the School Board. I would like to ask you if the Metropolitan School Board or the Separate School Board have done anything to widen the Portuguese mother's understanding of what's going on in the schools.

I would like to ask all of you who come in contact with Portuguese mothers in your daily lives to be patient and try to keep in mind that she wants to understand, but in order to understand, she has to be understood.

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